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ABSTRACT

Thanks to ever-increasing high-level advocacy and the added incentive provided by Goals 2000 legislation, many states have completed or are working on school technology plans. Although technology planning occurs at multiple levels, many principles are identical, and with careful cooperation, facets of a plan at one level will often "dovetail" with facets of other plans. Planners need to engage the services, creativity, and assistance of all stakeholders. Efforts of all participants in the planning process need to be marshaled to meet established timelines, to accept delegated responsibilities, and to evaluate progress. Then a plan can be created which addresses appropriate financial, technical, functional, architectural, and legal realities. (Contains 15 references.) (BEW)

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ERIC DIGEST

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Introduction

In the early 1990s, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), a professional organization of state superintendents of education, released a position paper (Improving, 1991) advocating that all states develop and maintain written plans for integrating technology in the education curriculum. In the ensuing years, with the added incentive provided by Goals 2000 legislation, (Congress, 1993) many states have completed, or are currently working on technology plans.

Key Principles of Technology Planning

- **Include people in the community.** Planners need to involve all school and community "stakeholders" in the planning process. This is probably the most important advice one can receive related to technology planning.
- **Establish timelines and monitor them often.** Planning will be far more successful if key participants work from a mutually-understood timeline. It is a good idea to print the timeline and display it prominently. The timeline should be addressed and monitored often. This will help keep planners on task and ensure that goals are reached in a timely fashion.
- **Delegate responsibilities for planning.** The chairperson of the planning committee should make use of the particular expertise and talents of each committee member when assigning responsibilities. It is important to compliment committee members when they perform admirably.
- **Evaluate.** Technology planning experts often say that there are three things to remember when building and implementing a technology plan: "evaluate, evaluate, evaluate." Planners will need to monitor all planning activities and include an evaluation program that will help them track the success of their activities.

Local Planning

A local or building level technology plan is more specific than a district or a state plan. A local plan focuses on the learner and the associated activities, principles, and materials required to ensure that the desired instructional activities occur. Teachers and administrators who develop local plans will need to pay strict attention to the curriculum issues in the school. Technologies will support curriculum delivery and learning activities. A local technology plan will need a vision statement, a mission statement, and goals for how technology will be used in teaching and learning.

District Planning

School district technology plans provide strategies for incorporating technological solutions in all local schools. A district plan provides an overview of what local schools wish to accomplish. District planners should remember to involve a cross-section of leaders from various schools in the district in the planning process. The committee needs to hold periodic "town meetings" to explain the plan, report progress, and explain related activities. The district planning committee should seek and acquire "buy-in" throughout the process from all members of the community.

The scope of planning is much broader at the district level than at the local level. Curriculum concerns, for example, will span a greater breadth of subject matter. Districts need to plan for great diversity as they consider the ages of students, teaching delivery methods, and assessment techniques. Since there may be local variance in some of the key elements that go into a district plan, it is important that planners incorporate input from local schools in their technology plans.

A district plan will include, and address in detail, elements that may not appear in a local plan at all. For example, a district plan might include district funding strategies, public relations tactics, and strategies for using technology in administration, transportation, food service, guidance, and student services. Most importantly, the district needs to outline how it will provide leadership and guidance for those who will implement and benefit from the plan.

State Planning

Just as a district technology plan is more general and less specific than a local plan, so a state plan is more general and less specific than a district plan. While some parts of a state plan will have elements that are specific, their specificity will deal with principles that are general in nature. A state-level plan addresses many issues mentioned in school district plans, and may provide a compilation of concerns and desires illuminated by the district plans. A state may want to describe how its financial support for districts will enable schools to integrate technologies into instruction and administration. A state may also want to describe the process by which districts will be accountable to the state for the funds given them.

Dovetailed Elements

While local, district, and state plans are significantly different in certain areas, several similarities exist. Planners use the term "dovetail" to describe the manner in which these plans fit with each other.

State-level planners need to decide whether they will adopt a top down or bottom-up scheme. If a top-down approach is taken, the state will fashion a plan, then ask districts to follow the state's guidelines. In some cases, where the state uses a top-down technique, the district may employ a bottom-up method. For example, the district might craft its vision statement only after it has compiled vision statements from all schools within the district.

A state plan will, most likely, define a framework into which district plans should fit. Often, statewide technology coordinators will develop a handbook that district planners will use as a guide for building the district plan. In this way, the district plan will "fit," or dovetail into the state plan. The district, then, will use input from local plans to dovetail into the district plan.

Realities of Planning

- **Financial.** A technology plan needs to address the amount of money that will be required to implement and maintain whatever the plan proposes, how matching money, if necessary, will be sought, how leveraged money might be needed in the future, how finances will be managed, what the contingency plans might be if additional funding is secured or if a shortfall occurs, and how funds will be allocated to pay for planned obsolescence. Planners need to remember that public funds are employed in the infusion of technologies into instruction; therefore, strong accountability to the community is necessary.

- **Technical.** As state, district, and local groups consider and include the technical components of their plans, they need to recognize the impact of rapid technological change and growth. Plans need not focus on, but should certainly include hardware and software. Inclusion of a detailed technical plan that addresses technological obsolescence will help to plan for future equipment upgrades.

- **Human capital.** A technology plan needs to outline the ways in which human talent will be incorporated. Many models show effective employment of human capital, and planners need to examine existing technology plans that demonstrate how this is done.

- **Architectural.** When planners specify the design of structures or areas where technology will be used, careful attention needs to be devoted to eliminating any obstacles that will obstruct or hinder teaching and learning. Consulting with an experienced architect is well worth the time and money.

- **Legal.** At all levels of planning, legal concerns are important. Not only do planners need to consider protection for the "system," but strategies need to be outlined for the protection of students and other learners. Consult with community resources for legal advice.

Summary

Although technology planning occurs at multiple "levels," many principles are identical. Planners need to engage the services, creativity, and assistance of all stakeholders. Efforts of all participants in the planning process need to be marshaled to meet established timelines, to accept delegated responsibilities, and to evaluate progress along the way. Planners at the local, district, and state levels are encouraged to share the work they create. Through open, willing sharing, all learners will benefit.

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